

Sober Minded: It May Not Be a Sin to Drink Alcohol, But ...

If you have been around the church for any length of time, you have probably heard Christians use Jesus to justify their drinking. I have heard many say “Jesus turned the water into wine” and “If Jesus were walking the earth today, He would hang out in the bars and minister to people.” But as common as these statements are, I have yet to find a Scripture reference that clearly places our Messiah in a local bar. On the contrary, Jesus went out of His way to exemplify a life of purity for us to follow.

People are always trying to put something in the hand of Jesus to justify what they don't want to let go of. As David Wilkerson wrote in his book *Sipping Saints*, “Our sinless High Priest ate with publicans and sinners and drank the pure juice of the vine. But never did He sit in the seat of the scornful or touch the cup when its contents were ‘red and biting.’”

Father God did an amazing job creating the minds of those He made in His image. We have the natural ability to justify whatever we really want to do, have or experience. Too often we live exactly as we desire, with the title “Christian” having little bearing on the choices we make to please ourselves. Many of us barely notice others are watching. Too easily we say, “I don't need to change for them. If they don't like how I live, that's their problem.”

Before your blood starts boiling, let me make something very clear: Drinking alcohol is not a sin, nor does it confirm a one-way pass to hell. Yet we must also remember Hebrews 12:1: “Therefore, since we are encompassed with such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

The weight mentioned here slowly drags us down and keeps us from winning the race. We are not the best judge of what easily entangles us. Often when we are in the trap, we cannot see it for what it is. That is how a web of deception works. We need help to recognize it, so the Holy Spirit often sends others to shed light on any dark areas in our lives. They help awaken us to places in which our eyes have slowly adjusted to darkness.

Over the years, many have told me how they thought their use of alcohol was “no big deal.” Yet before they knew it, they were in too deep, and the addiction overcame them. Compromise influences us to systematically remove the security fences that once kept danger at a distance. It usually happens without our noticing it.

Love, Not Legalism

“Grace” is the most misunderstood word among Christians today. Too many in the body of Christ do not extend enough grace to the lost. Yet grace is used as an excuse by Christians to justify personal lifestyles and preferences. Grace is often regarded as the key that opens the door to a newfound “freedom” to live out one’s personal beliefs instead of aligning oneself with the complete Word of God.

“Legalism” has become a convenient catchphrase. Many professing Christians use it to defend something they want the freedom to do, see or enjoy. Sadly, this card is often played as an excuse not to do the right thing. It is evident in the lack of discipline administered to children and a lack of accountability within the whole body of Christ—yes, especially the adults.

Most religions are based on restrictive guidelines that keep their believers bound and jumping through difficult hoops in order to remain in good standing. But Christianity is not now and never was based on legalism.

When serving God is only about rules, there is a lack of relationship. God enjoyed the relational contact He had with Adam and Eve and desired relationship with everyone who came from Adam's seed. Sin disrupted the relational process and separated man from God. Ever since, Father God has desired to get us "back to the garden." He gave His Son, Jesus, for this very purpose. Evangelism is that simple: getting people back to the garden with the Father.

When we embrace God's wonderful gift of salvation, we no longer need to pull out the legalism card to defend our personal preferences or distract from the real issues inside us. When we Christians are truly in relationship with Jesus, we desire to show our love to Him in any way we can.

Living a life with Jesus brings freedom—freedom from fear-based religion, freedom from bondage, freedom from our selfish desires and freedom to become who we really are. Sadly, some believers misuse the grace Jesus lavished on us as a freedom to sin instead of freedom from sin.

The freedom Christ won for us is not without boundaries, as Paul explained: "You, brothers, have been called to liberty. Only do not use liberty to give an opportunity to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

In John 14:15, Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." If we truly love Him, then out of that love we will do what He says. Keeping Christ's commands becomes a joy, not a burden. What He spoke of in this verse is a clear way of measuring our love for Him. If we love Jesus, it will show in our obedience to Him and His commands. However, we Christians often speak love with our words while speaking an even louder lack of love with our actions.

If we allow it, love, grace and accountability will work together to perfect us.

Under the Influence

In Matthew 24:10-13, Jesus says, "Then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will rise and will deceive many. Because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved."

Wilkerson understood this and was all but crucified by many in the church when his book *Sipping Saints* released in 1978. The book was his reaction to a church culture filled with compromise. Its message is still relevant today. Brother Wilkerson rightly understood that our enemy spins webs and makes them seem attractive—so alluring, in fact, that God's people get re-entangled in nets from which they were freed when they first came to Jesus.

I am amazed at how aggressively some Christians defend what they love. I am not talking about evangelism or a command of Jesus but personal preferences, habits and worldly desires. Test this for yourself: Make a few posts on social media and watch the responses you get from Christians. Many are eager to engage in a battle of words against what they see as overzealous and unrealistic ideas. Nothing seems to trigger as much anger as warnings about alcohol. The very mention of a higher standard sparks outrage from some.

If only this were not true of church leaders! I have personally watched leaders tolerate flimsy freedom arguments and defend their own right to drink. This in turn encourages their congregations to take this so-called freedom to the next level, thereby introducing some to new numbing experiences and reintroducing others to painful bondages from the past.

I recall a pastor who reintroduced a staff member to social drinking. This young minister had previously been delivered, with the help of a faith-based rehab program, from many years of alcohol dependency. Sadly, his new foray into social drinking led him back to his old addiction. He soon lost his ministry and family. The trouble went even deeper: The church

was devastated by compromise among its younger followers. The domino effect was evident when several other young people returned to old lifestyles and addictions. Others left the church and eventually walked away from the Lord.

The personal stories of former alcoholics all have one common denominator: They battled with demonic control or influence when drinking. But why would followers of Jesus allow any influence into their lives that has the potential to dominate them? The apostle Paul was clear about questionable influences, writing, “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be brought under the power of anything” (1 Cor. 6:12).

Pastor Kenny Luck writes, “Drinking is about control. Men love to push the limit, getting as close to the cliff as possible. Unfortunately, alcohol can blur the lines, turning a black and white issue into hazy gray. It’s in those gray moments we can think things, say things and do things under the control of another ‘spirit.’ The Bible clearly states to be ‘sober’ minded and do not get drunk so that we never surrender our body, mind or soul to anything other than God. Most of us all have stories about waking up after we’ve surrendered control, and it’s not pretty. So we have to choose to stay away from the cliff, and be wise.”

The Bible itself makes the matter plain. Proverbs 20:1 says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whoever is deceived by it is not wise.” And in Ephesians 5:18, Paul writes, “Do not be drunk with wine, for that is reckless living. But be filled with the Spirit.”

Lead by Example

According to Jesus’ own mandate, Christians are called to lead. Not all are chosen to lead a church or ministry, but each of us is called to lead people, especially the lost. The

question is, what kind of leadership will we provide?

Proverbs 31:4b-5 advises, "It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of any of the afflicted."

As leaders in the faith, we are called to be strong, sharp and focused in our lifestyle of helping widows, orphans and others in need, especially those who come seeking deliverance from addiction.

Jesus' words in Matthew 18:5-7 are clear: Stumbling blocks will come, but we must do all we can to make sure we aren't causing the stumbling. To the extent that we leaders embrace personal tolerances that cause young believers to become re-enslaved in old sins, we become vessels used by the enemy. Although I would never tell Christians they are unsaved or living in sin because they choose to drink alcohol, I will tell them this: By using alcohol, you risk forfeiting huge opportunities to be used by God to bring transformation and healing to the lives of many.

For example, I often receive requests to pray for people seeking freedom from alcoholism. Do you think people trapped in this bondage would come to me for prayer if they thought I drank any amount of alcohol? I believe the answer is no. To them, drinking is drinking, even if I drank socially and only on rare occasions. My level of consumption would be irrelevant, because most people seeking deliverance started out drinking socially and in moderation.

As Jesus stood in the synagogue to read from the prophet Isaiah, He knew the directive was not only for Him but for all who would follow Him. We as believers are also mandated to "preach deliverance to the captives" (Luke 4:18b). Such public and private proclamations would have little strength if we were bound by the same spirits as the captives.

Allowing compromise to make us numb to God's laws is a

treacherous path that leads to our love growing painfully cold. We humans share the inherent belief that we can (and should) retain all control over our lives. This becomes problematic when we ask Jesus to be our Lord. The foundational desire to protect our freedom and remain in the driver's seat means we are choosing the title of Lord for ourselves and expecting Jesus to jump in when we think we need Him.

If we fear judgment, we have to ask ourselves what we are trying to hide. An innocent man standing before a just judge is not fearful. Instead he is eager to expose the truth and clear his name. Because our judge is just, it is to our advantage to expose the truth even when we are guilty. We need to accept our missteps and own them.

We really should stop asking the Lord to lead us if we are not prepared to follow whatever route and method He chooses. When we pray, "Be Lord of my life," are we not giving Him the full authority of His lordship over our past, present and future? If so, then we should open our arms wide to embrace His life-saving, future-promoting correction, direction and judgment.

Ron Pratt is president and founder of *This Generation Ministries*, which aims to reach the lost of Alaska, then train and release them to spread the gospel.

CHARISMA is the only magazine dedicated to reporting on what the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of believers around the world. If you are thirsty for more of God's presence and His Holy Spirit, subscribe to *CHARISMA* and join a family of believers that choose to live life in the Spirit. [CLICK HERE](#) for a special offer.